

The Crisis in Economics: The Post-Autistic Economics Movement – The first 600 days, edited by Edward Fullbrook, London and New York: Routledge, 2003. Paper, ISBN: 0-415-30898-4; 226 pages.

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The Crisis in Economics is an excellent historical reference book that documents the birth of a worldwide economics students revolt against the lack of pluralism in the teaching and practice of economics. The post-autistic economics (PAE) movement started in France in June 2000 when a group of economics students published a petition in which they argued that economics has become an “autistic science” through the “uncontrolled use” of mathematics as “an end in itself” in economic theory. The revolting students deplored the repressive dominance of Neoclassical theory in the university economics curriculum, and the dogmatic teaching style, which leaves no place for critical and reflective thought (p. 1). The students’ petition called for prioritizing science over scientism in the teaching of economics through engagement with empirical and concrete economic realities, and for creating a pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach to studying complex social and economic problems (p. 1).

The PEA movement spread quickly in France and around the world as the media picked up the news about the revolting economics students. The complaints reached the French Minister of Education, Jack Lang, who commissioned an investigation led by Jean-Paul Fitoussi. In September 2001, the Fitoussi report was published (“L’Enseignement Supérieur de l’Économie en Question”) and called for two fundamental reforms that must be made in the teaching of economics:

First, it calls for the integration of debate on contemporary economic issues into both the structure and content of university economics courses [...]. Second, Fitoussi’s report demands that multidisciplinary be placed at the heart of the teaching of economics (p. 5-6).

It is important to note that the Neoclassical camp did not remain idle throughout this process. In October 2001, the Neoclassicals launched their counter-attack. Notably, Robert Solow, Olivier Blanchard, and Amartya Sen were brought into the debate in a three-page *Le Monde* series of eight articles that displayed an interesting strategy they used to mislead the audience and to avoid the real issues at hand.

For their defence they have adopted the strategy of misrepresenting their adversaries’ position. This cynicism stunned members of the French student opposition [...]. From its inception, the post-autistic challenge to traditionalist practice has been very clear about its two principal points of contention:

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1. the issue of pluralism versus single-minded dogmatism and the imperative need for the former in economics, and
2. the need to liberate economics from its autistic obsession with formal models that have no obvious empirical reference (p. 22-23).

Furthermore, to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding, the reform movement has emphasized – and the French students especially – that it does **not** oppose the instrumental use of mathematics in economics any more than it does in the natural sciences, but rather its use as an end in itself. It is mathematics for science versus mathematics for scientism that is the dividing line. The traditionalists, however, have seized upon the possibility here for misunderstanding as their main line of defence. Several of the *Le Monde* articles exploit this possibility as a means of deflecting discussion into a pseudo-debate. Counting on the relative ignorance of their readers, the articles work to convey the false impression that the reform movement wants and only wants to banish **all** mathematics from economics (p. 23; emphasis in original).

Several prominent non-orthodox economists were actively involved in the debates around the PAE movement, many of them are amongst the contributors to this volume, including James K. Galbraith, Geoff Harcourt, Peter E. Earl, Steve Keen, Tony Lawson, Anne Mayhew, Susan Feiner, Julie A. Nelson, Edward Fullbrook, Deirdre McCloskey, Sheila C. Dow, Paul Ormerod, Geoffrey Hodgson, Ben Fine, Marc Lavoie, Warren J. Samuels, and James G. Devine. Today (April 2005), more than 8,000 people from approximately 150 countries subscribe to the *PAE Review* (formerly known as the *PAE Newsletter*), which is edited by Edward Fullbrook. A wealth of information and resources can be found at the PAE website at www.paecon.net.

After the introduction from the editor, the book is organized in three parts. Part One contains the key documents from the PAE movement such as the initial petition by the French students followed by that of the French professors, two of the initial issues of the PAE newsletter, the *Opening up Economics* statement by the Cambridge 27, and *The Kansas City Proposal*.

Part Two, entitled *Teaching*, contains seventeen essays dealing specifically with the dominance of Neoclassical economics and the lack of pluralism in the teaching of economics. The contributors to this part are: James K. Galbraith, Joseph Halevi, Hugh Stretton, Jacques Sapir, Gilles Raveaud, Geoff Harcourt, Steve Keen, Grazia Ietto-Gillies, Emmanuelle Biencourt, Alan Shipman, Peter E. Earl, Peter Söderbaum, Susan Feiner, Geoff Harcourt, and Bernard Guerrien.

Part Three contains twenty-six essays gathered under the general heading of *Practice and Ethics*. The contributors to this part are: Frank Ackerman, André Orléan, Edward Fullbrook, Deirdre McCloskey, Tony Lawson, Sheila C. Dow, Kurt Jacobsen, Paul Ormerod, Geoffrey Hodgson, Ben Fine, Frank Ackerman, Michael A. Bernstein, Julie A. Nelson, Geoff Harcourt, James K. Galbraith, Jeff Gates, Anne Mayhew, Bruce Edmonds, Jason Potts, John Nightingale, Steve Keen, Marc Lavoie, Jean Gadrey, Warren

J. Samuels, Katalin Martinás, George M. Frankfurter, Elton G. McGoun, and James G. Devine.

It is impossible to review all the articles in this book, but I have to say that all of them are equally insightful and make important points. The contributors show a broad agreement about their critique of Neoclassical economics, but it is hard to discern a common/unifying paradigm in such very short articles. The book brings together a great deal of pluralistic contributions highlighting the possibilities for common ground among heterodox traditions. After following the PAE movement and recent developments in heterodox economics, I have a feeling that we have reached an unprecedented level of cohesiveness to build a unified paradigm in a Critical Realist tradition; an interdisciplinary heterodox paradigm that is grounded in reality because it encompasses the plurality of theories that Post Keynesians, Marxists, Institutionalists, Feminists, and Social Economists bring to the fore.

The book does not have a conclusion chapter, perhaps on purpose, but it would have been useful for the readers to have some sort of conclusion at the end of the book. A conclusion does not have to mean a conclusion to the PAE movement, but rather a summary statement for the lessons learned in the first 600 days of the movement as well as a forward-looking statement about what could be done to support and strengthen the reforms called for by the students.

The Crisis in Economics would be an excellent supplementary text for courses such as history of economic thought, economic methodology, and political economy. The material is easily accessible to non-economists and could be used in other social sciences to illustrate the similarity in terms of lack of pluralism in other disciplines as well. Every economics student and teacher as well as anyone interested in recent developments in intellectual and social trends should read *The Crisis in Economics*. We owe it to ourselves as a community of scholars who value intellectual integrity; and we owe it to society as a whole to deliver the most honest and comprehensive work to better our understanding of social reality. *The Crisis in Economics* and the PAE movement aim to move us in that direction.